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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 001336

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TAGS: REL MARR AG ML

SUBJECT: ALGERIAN MFA: WE ARE WAITING FOR TOURE TO KEEP HIS PROMISES

REF: A. BAMAKO 1029
1B. BAMAKO 1015
1C. BAMAKO 1017
1D. ALGIERS 1278

Classified By: Ambassador Robert S. Ford, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: MFA Director General (A/S equivalent) for African Affairs Chergui told Ambassador on 9/17 that Malian

President Toure must pull troops out of Kidal and take steps to start reintegrating Tuareg fighters back into their communities in order to end the fighting in northern Mali. Chergui said that both measures were integral parts of the Algiers Accords and there was no hope of securing the terms of the accords without them. Chergui said the Algerian government is sending in more supplies to the Malian garrison besieged in Tinzawaten, and he acknowledged that rebel leader Bahanga is also getting supplies, although he claimed it was only indirectly. He underlined that while the Algerian government thinks the Malian army should quit Kidal, it also hopes the Malians will have a credible garrison permanently in Tinzawaten, backed by Tuareg special security units under Malian control, in order to police the Algerian-Malian border. He asked for an American contribution to the small fund established to help reintegrate Tuareg fighters into their communities. End Summary.

ALGIERS: MALIANS AND TUAREGS ARE TALKING READILY

12. (C) Chergui asserted that lines of communication between the Malian government and Bahanga were open. He thought that Iyad ag Ghali was playing a useful role and seemed surprised when Ambassador noted we were hearing reports to the contrary. Chergui then brushed the issue aside and noted that the Algerian ambassador in Bamako has a mandate from Algiers to work with both sides to end the dispute. The Algerian ambassador, he stated, has good contacts with both the government and the ADC as well as Bahanga.

BESIEGED TOWN OF TINZAWATEN AND THE GARRISON'S FUTURE

13. (C) Chergui said that as part of an agreement with the GoM dating to the beginning of September, the Algerian army provided food supplies to the besieged Malian garrison in

Tinzawaten on September 17. The Algerians had agreed to supply the Tinzawaten garrison for thirty days during which time they hope a more durable settlement can be reached; the September 17 delivery was ten days' worth of food.

Chergui noted that the Algerian army carefully calculates how many Malian soldiers are in the garrison and exactly how many supplies they need. (Comment: This must come easily for the exasperatingly lawyer-like Algerians. End Comment.)

He commented that the Algerians are not directly supplying the Bahanga forces surrounding the town. Rather, under the broad supervision of the Algiers Accord implementation committee, the Algerians are delivering supplies to Tuareg civilians linked to the ADC. Those civilians in turn, he stated, may choose turn over supplies to Bahanga's men "for the prisoners." Chergui insisted that the GoA is not working directly with Bahanga, nor is it prepared to let him or his men transit Algerian territory.

¶4. (C) Chergui said that the GoA is being careful not to interfere in Malian internal affairs, but that President Toure (or, he noted, the Malian government) must withdraw Malian soldiers from Kidal. The Malian insertion of troops into Kidal had helped start the current conflict and the Algiers Accords require them to withdraw from the town.

(Chergui observed that the only reason the Malian army sent the soldiers there in the first place was to tighten control over the Tuareg, a strategy doomed to failure. He wondered about the credibility of the Malian promises about Kidal.) Chergui said that were the Malians to withdraw, Bahanga would accept a ceasefire around Tinzawaten and release the prisoners he holds. He said the Algerians had not discussed

sequencing of steps with either side, and they had not communicated to Bahanga that his forces should pull back from besieged Tinzawaten. Instead, he opined that were the Malian army to pull out of Kidal Bahanga would be left isolated among the ADC since many of its leaders had denounced Bahanga's May 2007 coup effort.

¶5. (C) Chergui underlined that the Algerian government wants a credible Malian army presence in Tinzawaten and that there is nothing preventing it in the Algiers Accord. Were the town garrisoned, he observed, it would be harder for the Malian government to claim ignorance about movements of terror groups in that area of the border. Chergui said the Algerians also are urging the Malian government to move forward with forming all four of the Tuareg special security units foreseen in the Algiers Accord to help block terrorist group movements in northern Mali. Two of the four units are being assembled and Algeria would like to see the other two created as well. One could, he noted, be based at Tinzawaten.

ECONOMIC PROJECTS ARE VITAL

¶6. (C) Chergui repeated what he told us last week about the Malian government also needing to move ahead with a small economic development program to help reintegrate former fighters into northern communities. He underlined the utility of even a small American contribution to the fund established under the terms of the Algiers Accords. Without movement on reintegration of Tuareg fighters and a redeployment out of Kidal, Chergui asserted that there was little hope of real stability in northern Mali.

¶7. (C) Chergui believed that the best way to deal with the current conflict was through negotiations, though he acknowledged that the military reinforcement of the Tinzawaten garrison from Kidal might end the fighting "in the next 48 hours." He asserted that the situation in Tinzawaten could return to normality "very quickly," but it would require the Malian government to decide to withdraw from

Kidal. Doing so, Chergui claimed, would reinforce the relationship between the ADC and the government, and further isolate Bahanga from the ADC. Chergui acknowledged that, even with a negotiated settlement, Bahanga's situation would become "very difficult." Bahanga knows, Chergui said, that he has made a big mistake.

COMMENT

¶ 8. (C) At no point in this friendly conversation did Chergui state that Algeria was seeking to back President Toure; indeed, he stayed studiously neutral in tone. (Part of this may stem from Chergui's long diplomatic career, but we suspect it also results at least in part from Algeria's particular interest in the Tuaregs.) We also think that the Algerians probably know more than their MFA is telling us so far, and we'll have to keep up the conversation to extract more from them. Chergui commented that Algeria hoped the Tuaregs and the Malian government would find peaceful ways to resolve their differences but he put the burden of next steps very much on the Malian government. So far, here in Algiers we sense that the Algerians are entirely ready to watch the Malian government twist in the wind while they wait for Toure to make some gesture on Kidal and economic re-integration.

FORD